

Minnesota Alternative Response Evaluation

Select Interim Evaluation Findings
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Introductory Notes

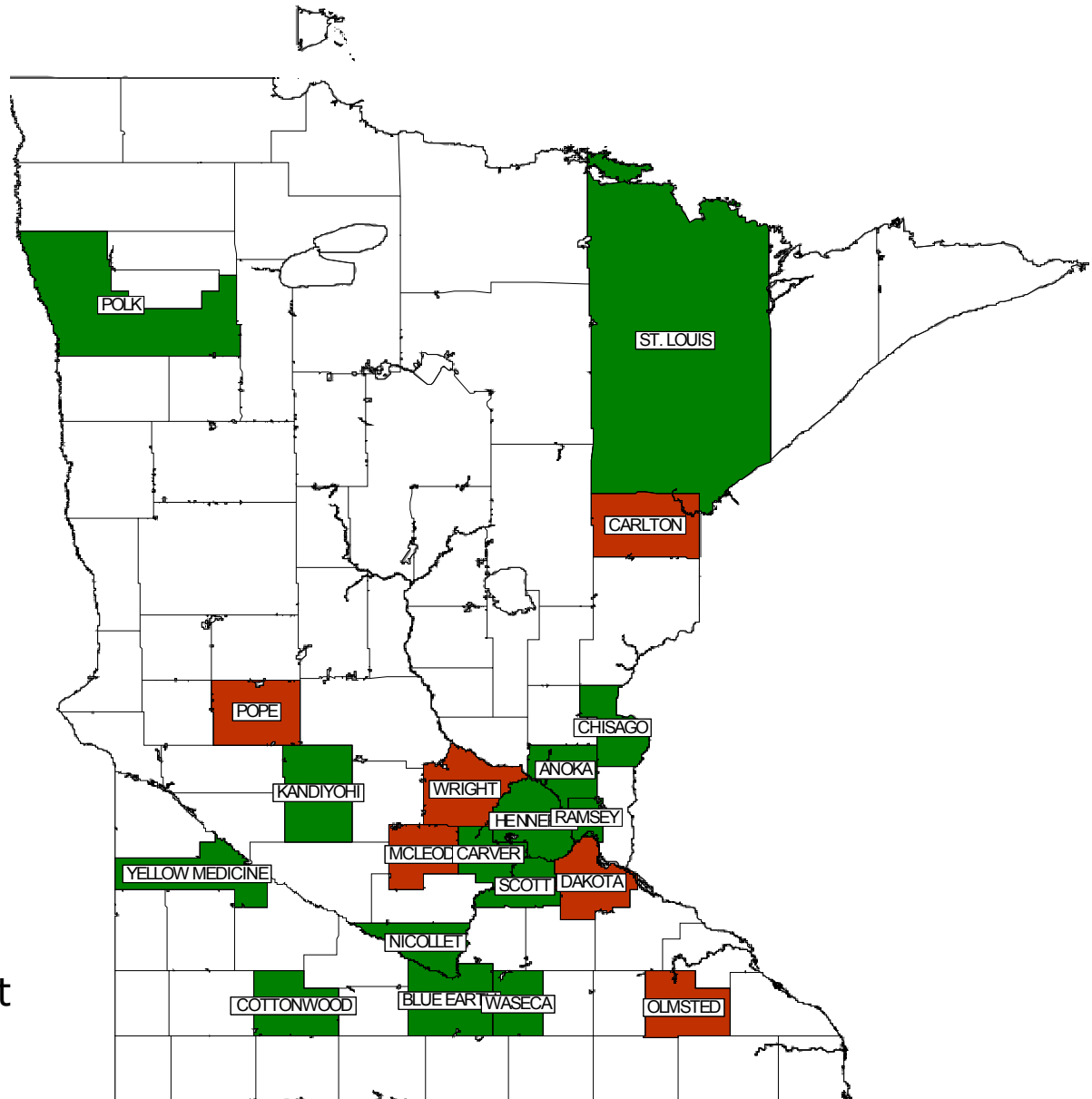
- This is an update on selected findings of IAR's evaluation of the Minnesota Alternate Response (AR) Child Welfare Demonstration. Additional information on the research design of the evaluation and background on the AR approach to child protection can be found in other documents that have been posted to the IAR website, in particular the First Annual Report (January 2002) and the Second Annual Report (January 2003).
- **Background.** The Alternative Response Project is a demonstration being conducted in 20 Minnesota counties. It provides a new and more flexible approach to addressing child maltreatment reports that do not meet Minnesota statutory requirements for a mandated investigation. Alternative response is a form of what some commentators have begun to call a differential response, which recognizes the diversity of families and child welfare problems that confront child protection systems (CPS) and incorporates this understanding into practice. The AR demonstration builds on the work of several local and national initiatives that have explored the possibilities of offering families a voluntary and strengths-based approach to resolving issues that brought them to the attention of the child protection system. The Alternative Response project is being supported by the McKnight Foundation along with federal, state and county funding.

Introductory Notes (continued)

- The Minnesota Alternative Response Project began during the latter half of 2000 and will operate as a demonstration program in 20 counties for a period of four years. Participating counties represent the diversity of the state and include large metro counties, fast-growing suburban counties, counties with mid-sized cities that are regional economic centers, and rural counties in different parts of greater Minnesota.
- A three-part evaluation of the project began in February, 2001 and will continue through the end of the demonstration period. It includes impact, process and cost effectiveness studies. In 14 counties, a control group of families was selected as part of an experimentally designed impact study. In impact study counties, families with child maltreatment reports appropriate for the Alternative Response are randomly (although disproportionately) assigned to experimental or control study groups. Families in the experimental group receive the Alternative Response, while families in the control group receive the Traditional Response (TR) in place prior to the demonstration.

Minnesota Counties Participating in Alternative Response Project

-  Counties with control groups
-  Counties without control groups



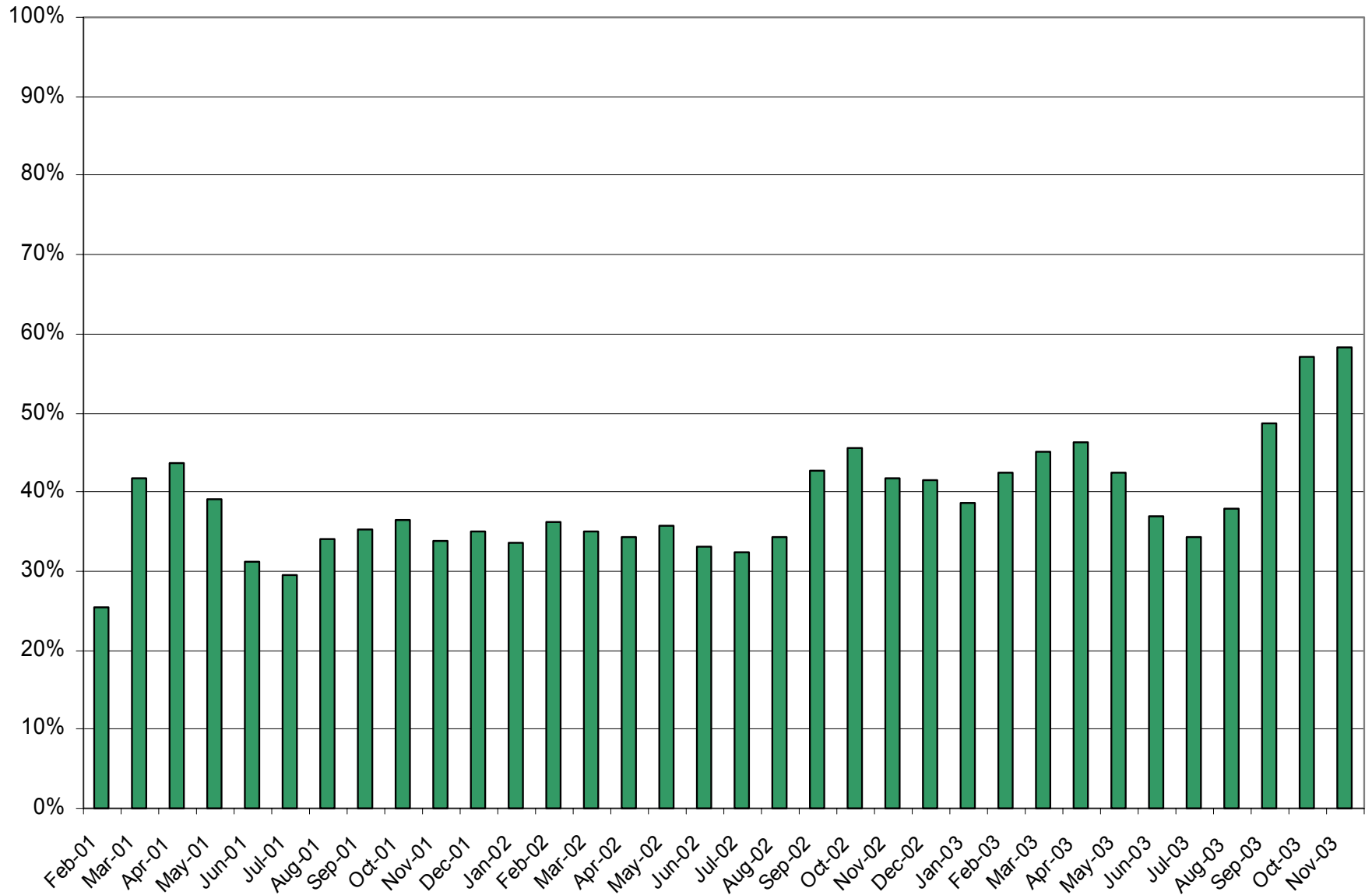
Screening

The graph on the following page shows the percent of reports that were judged to be appropriate for AR each month from the beginning of the demonstration through November 2003.

Two things are evident from the graph. One is the cyclical nature of reports, or at least those determined to be suitable for AR, with lows and highs over the calendar year. The second is the gradual increase in the percentage of reports across the 20 counties that were judged to be AR appropriate.

There continues to be considerable variation among the 20 counties in the proportion of reports screened for AR. Some have consistently screened a higher percentage for AR, while some remain conservative in assigning cases to AR. There are also counties that have varied from year to year in their AR screening percentage, something that can be caused by changes in personnel.

Percent of Reports Screened for AR



Data Sources and Collection

There are three primary data sources for the evaluation:

- 1) Extractions from the combined county data system managed by DHS—the Social Services Information System (SSIS).
- 2) Case-specific surveys completed by caseworkers.
- 3) Feedback from families.

Interim findings reported in this document come from the first and third of these (SSIS and family feedback).

Feedback from Families

- The evaluation includes follow-up of a large sample of AR and control (TR) families through surveys and interviews. Families have been contacted within the first quarter following the end of their contact with CPS. A sub-sample are re-contacted a second and third time at 12 month intervals.
- Through 12/31/03 feedback has been received from 1,170 families. This includes:
 - 475 families who received AR in the 14 impact study counties.
 - 386 control families in these counties who received a traditional investigation.
 - 309 AR families in the 6 counties without control groups.
- In addition, 677 of these families have been re-contacted a second time and 276 have been contacted a third time.

The following slides summarize some of the feedback received from families.

Summary of Findings related to Changes in Practice

The Alternative Response is intended to change social work practice in a number of specific ways. This involves the manner in which families are approached by caseworkers following a report of child maltreatment and the assistance they are given.

Families are being asked to describe what occurred during the CPS intervention and their attitudes about it.

In previous analyses, AR families have been more likely to report number of things consistent with the practice goals of the AR demonstration.

The list of findings on the following page represent significant differences between AR families and control families who received a traditional investigation.

The following differences have been found to be significant in previous analyses and remain significant.

AR families are more likely than control families to report the following:

- Greater satisfaction with the way they were treated by child protection workers.
- That they were treated in a friendly manner.
- That they were more involved in decision making.
- That CPS workers tried to understand their situation and needs.
- That they had a reduction in negative feelings.
- That workers met with them on subsequent occasions in which their children or whole family were present.
- That workers helped them obtain services.
- That workers provided direct assistance themselves to families.
- That workers connected them to other community resources.

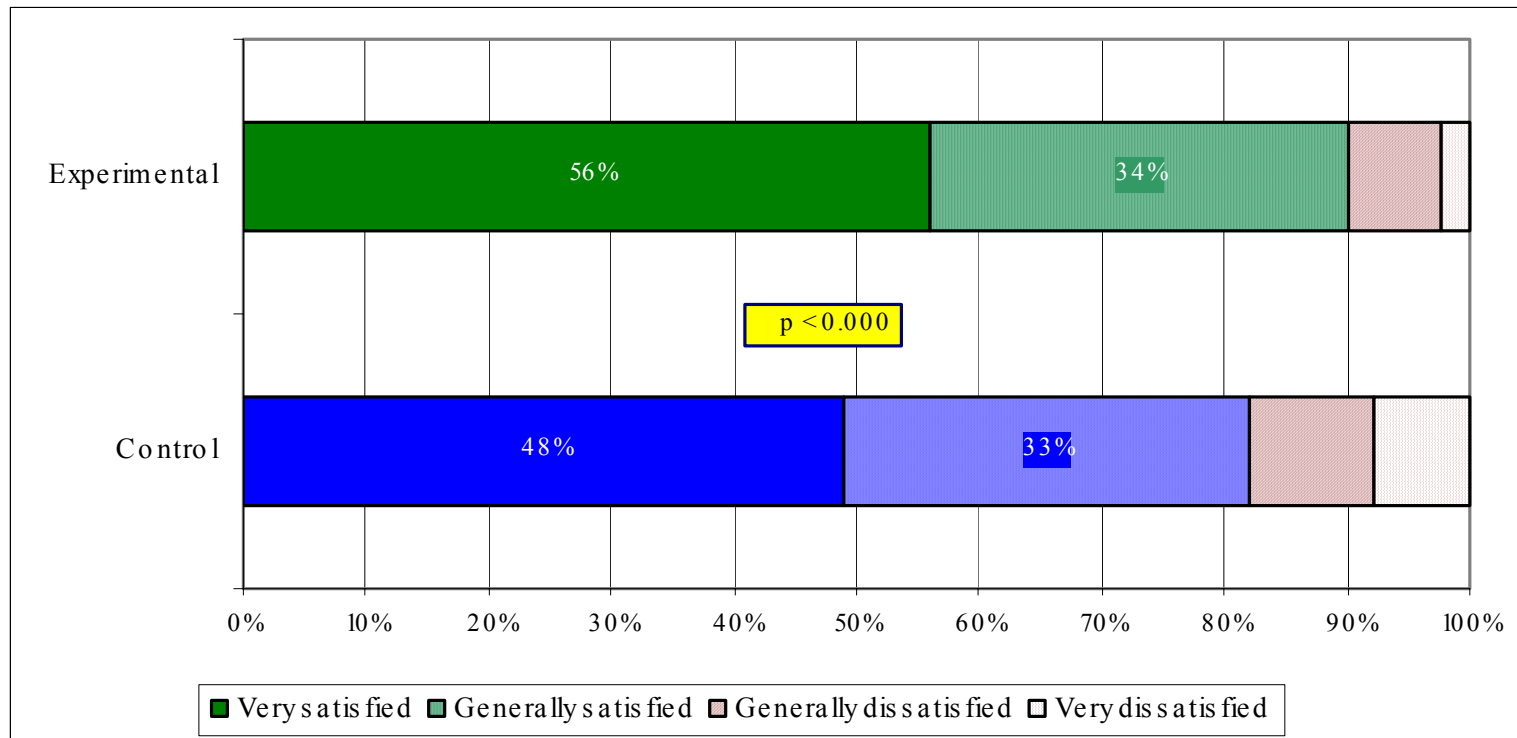
It is possible for differences to be statistically significant even when the difference does not appear to be substantial or to have practical consequences. By and large, the differences in practice that have been found to result from the introduction of AR are both statistically significant and have practical relevance.

At the same time, this does not mean that traditional practice has been flawed. While both AR and traditional interventions seek child safety first and foremost, traditional investigations have somewhat different objectives than AR assessments and are bound to produce some differences in the reactions of families.

The figures that follow show both of these findings. That is:

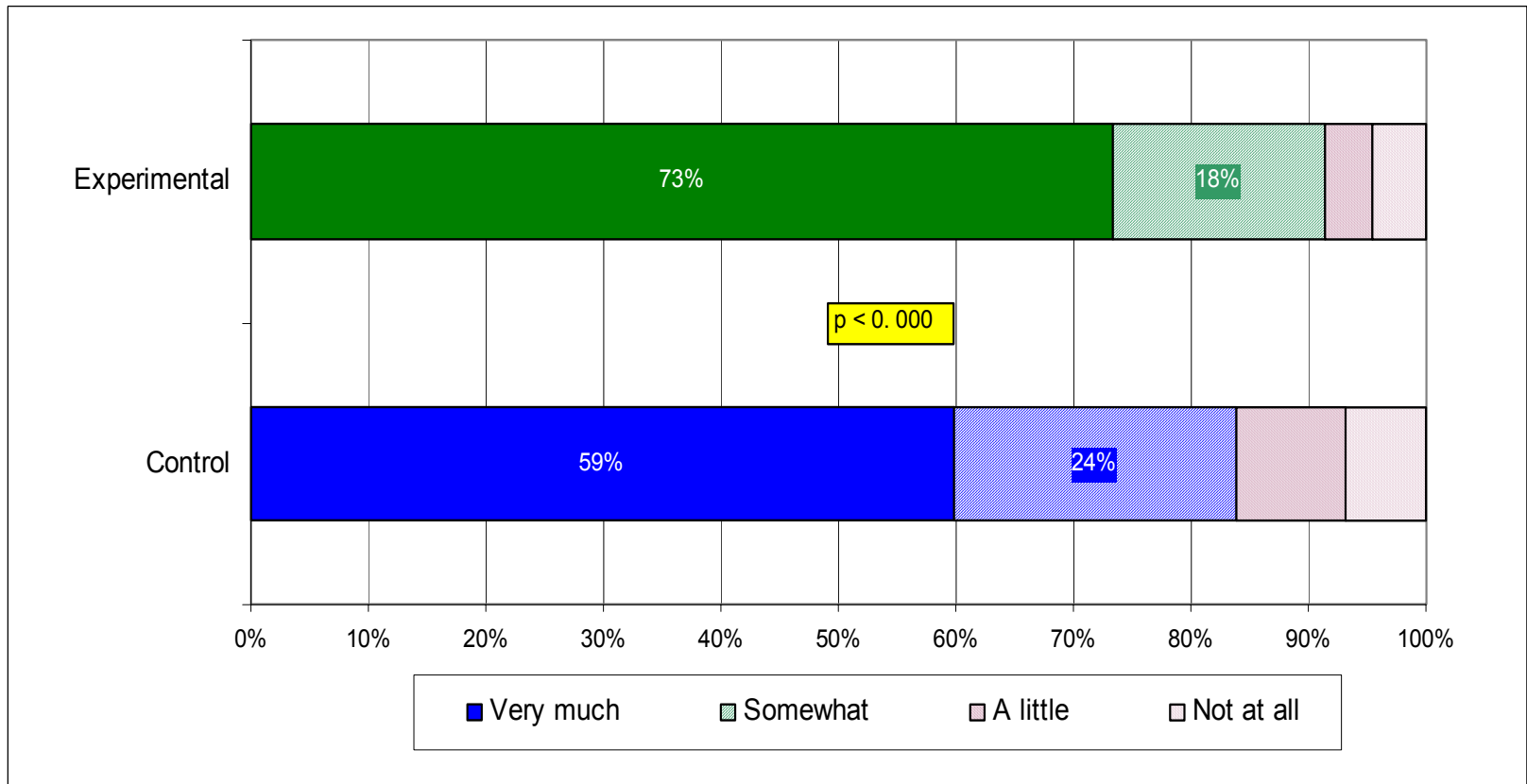
- 1) That, for a majority of families, traditional investigations in Minnesota do not produce negative reactions.
- 2) And yet, it is also true that AR assessments tend to be more positively received by families than traditional investigations.

Question: How satisfied are you with the way you and your family were treated by the worker that visited your home?
(AR=experimental. TR=control)



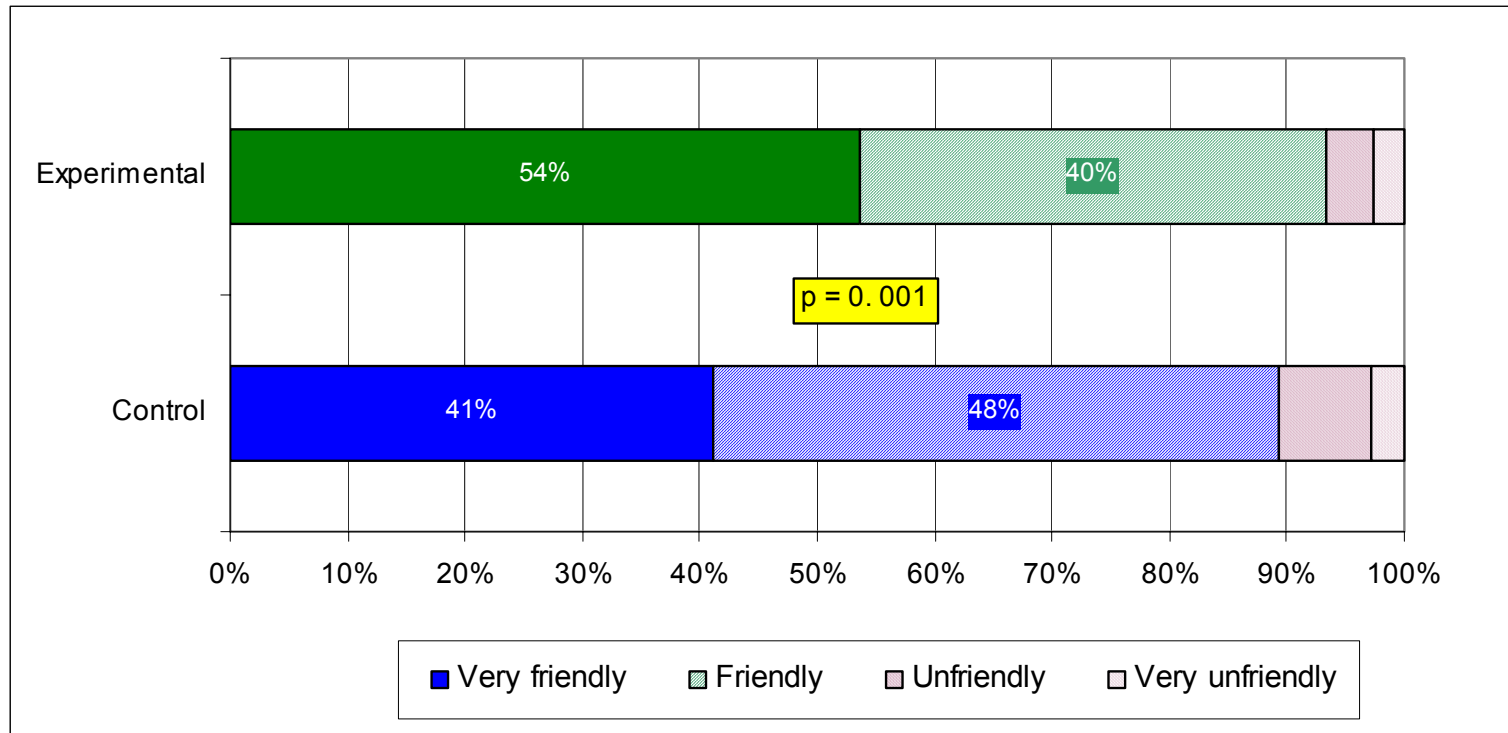
Question: Did the CPS workers who met with you try to understand your family's situation and needs?

(AR=experimental. TR=control)



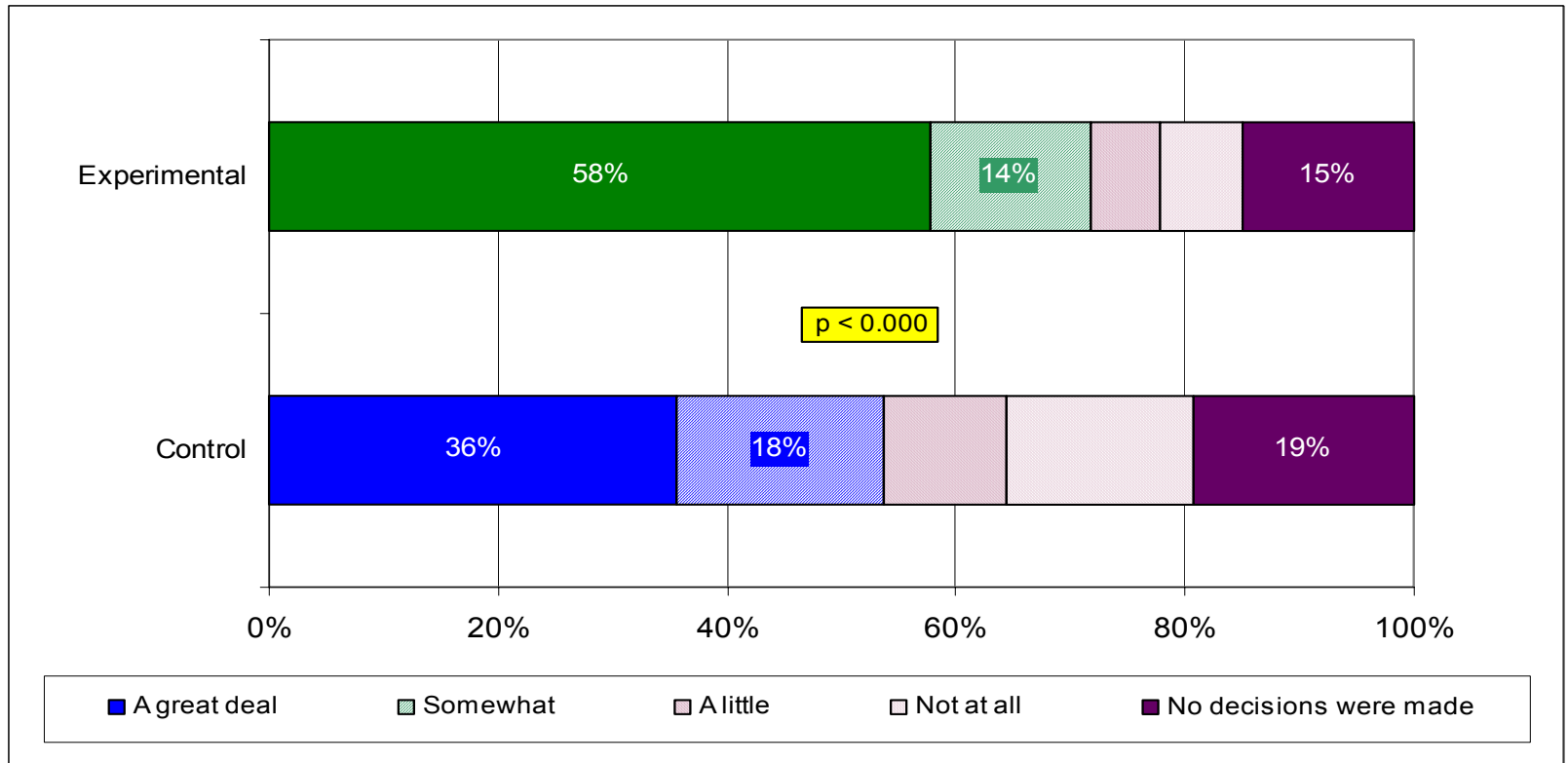
Question: Overall, were you treated in a manner that you would say was friendly or unfriendly?

(AR=experimental. TR=control)

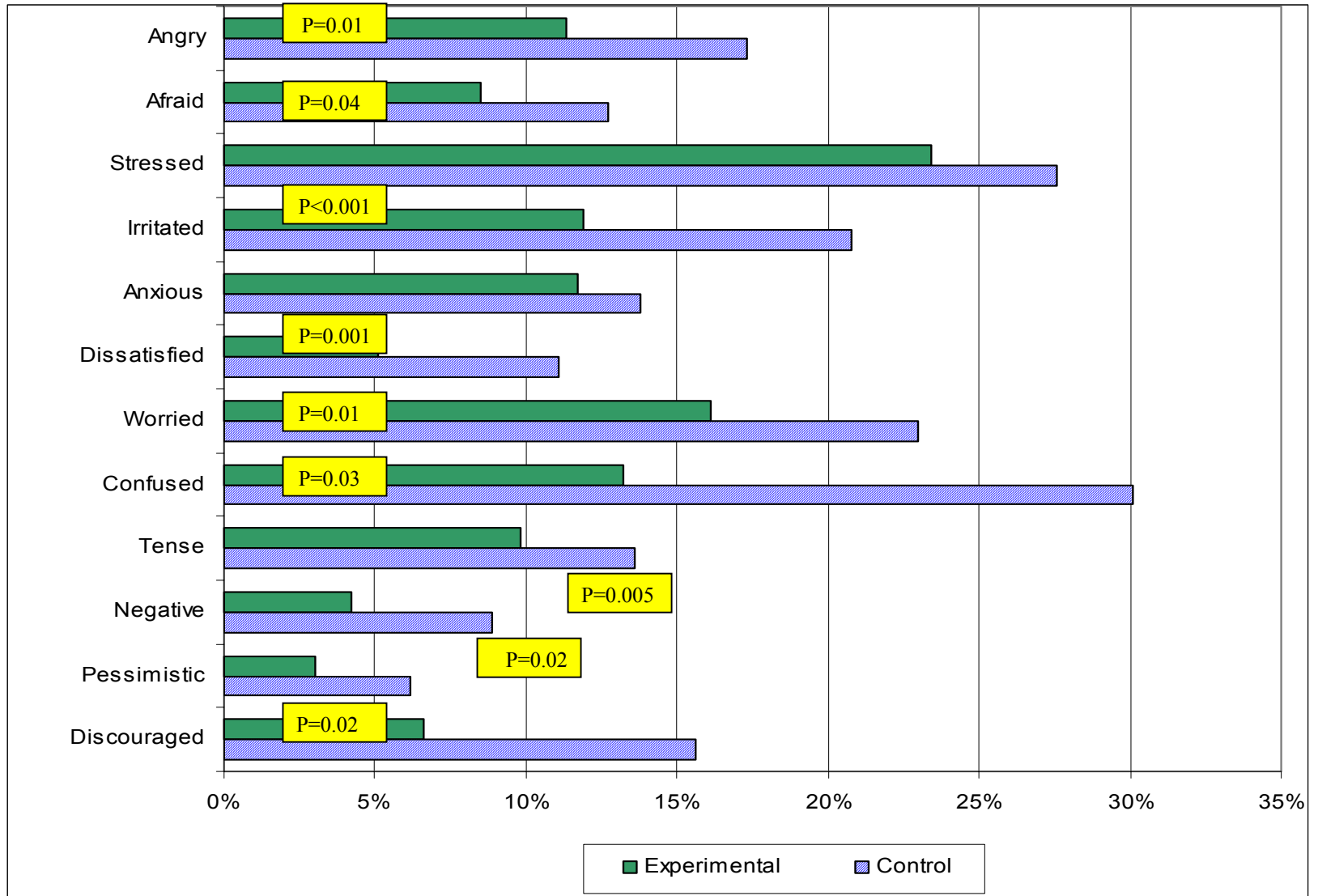


Question: Were you involved in the decisions that were made about your family and child(ren)?

(AR=experimental. TR=control)



Question: How would you describe your feelings at the end of the first visit from the CPS worker to your home? (Negatives)



New Findings related to AR Practice

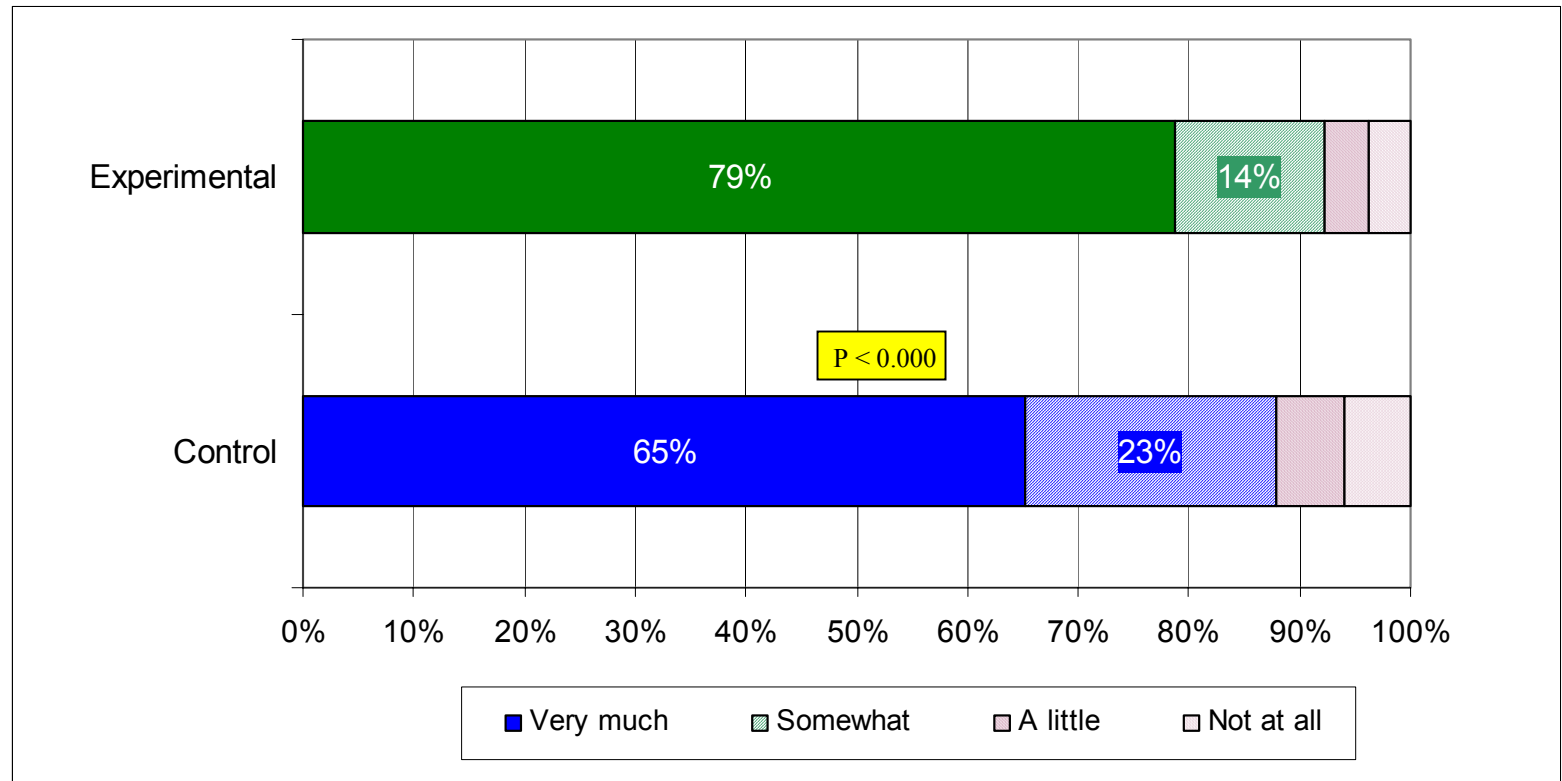
The following were not found to be significant in previous analyses.

AR families are more likely to report:

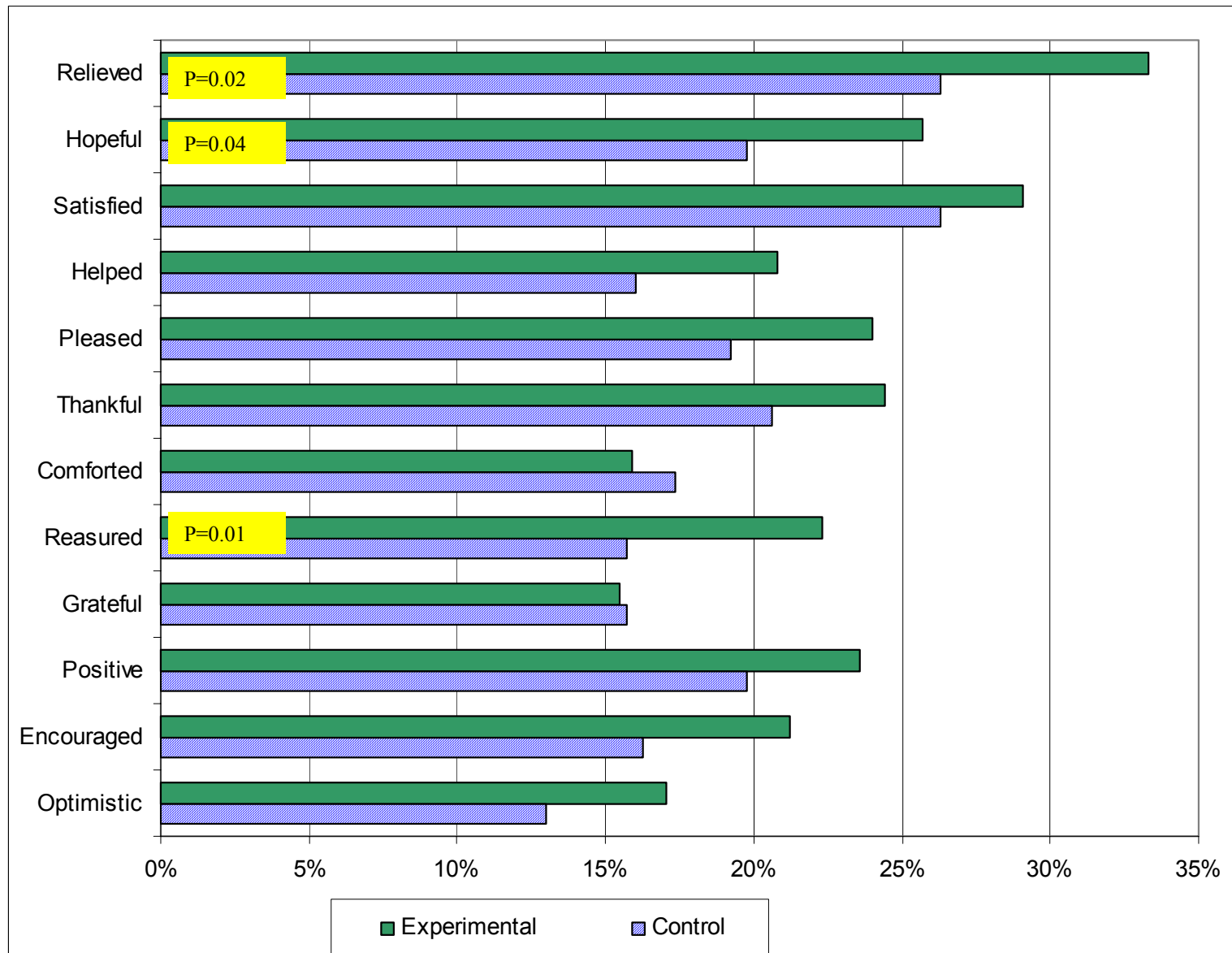
- Greater satisfaction with the help they received or were offered.
- That their family is better off because of this experience.
- That the county CPS workers they met with listened to what they and their family members had to say.
- That CPS workers treated them and their family fairly.
- That all matters important to them were discussed.
- In addition to lowering negative attitudes, AR has had a strong impact in raising positive attitudes.

Question: Did the CPS workers who met with you treat you and others in your family fairly?

(AR=experimental. TR=control)



Question: How would you describe your feelings at the end of the first visit from the county worker to your home? (Positives)



Services

AR families were more likely to report that they had received one or more specific services (54.3% vs. 35.6%).

AR families who received services (compared with TR families who received services) were more likely to say that the services they got:

- Were the kind they needed.
- Were enough to really help them.

AR families were more likely to report that they had received:

- Food or clothing for their family
- Home repairs, appliances, or furniture
- Help in looking for employment or in changing jobs
- Help paying utilities
- Other financial help
- Respite care

Among AR families from different ethnic/racial groups

There were no significant differences in:

Treatment received

- Level of satisfaction with the way they were treated by CPS worker
- Level of satisfaction with help they received
- Whether they were treated in a friendly manner
- Whether their family was better or worse off because of their CPS experience
- Extent to which they were involved in decision that were made
- Whether the CPS worker tried to understand their family's situation and needs
- The extent of positive or negative feelings following CPS home visit.

Among AR families from different ethnic/racial groups

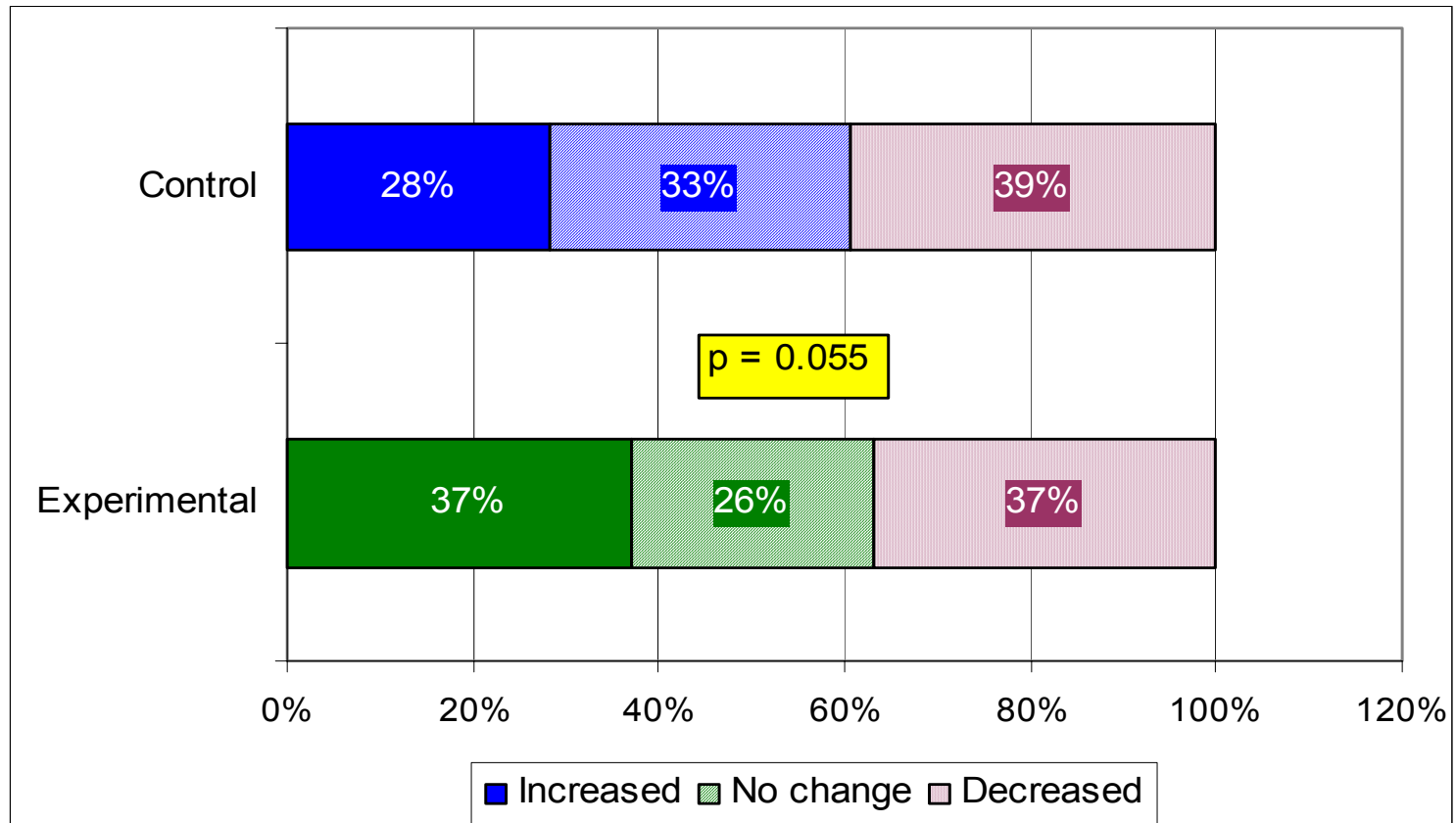
There were no significant differences in:

Services received

- Whether or not they had received any services
- The mean number of specific services received
- Whether they received the kind of assistance they needed
- Whether they received enough assistance to really help them
- Whether or not there was any assistance they wanted or needed but did not receive
- Whether the CPS worker helped them receive services from another agency
- Whether they were offered any services they turned down

Question: Has your current income increased or decreased since this time last year?

(AR=experimental. TR=control)



Summary of Findings from Second Follow-up

Effects are stronger when services are taken into account

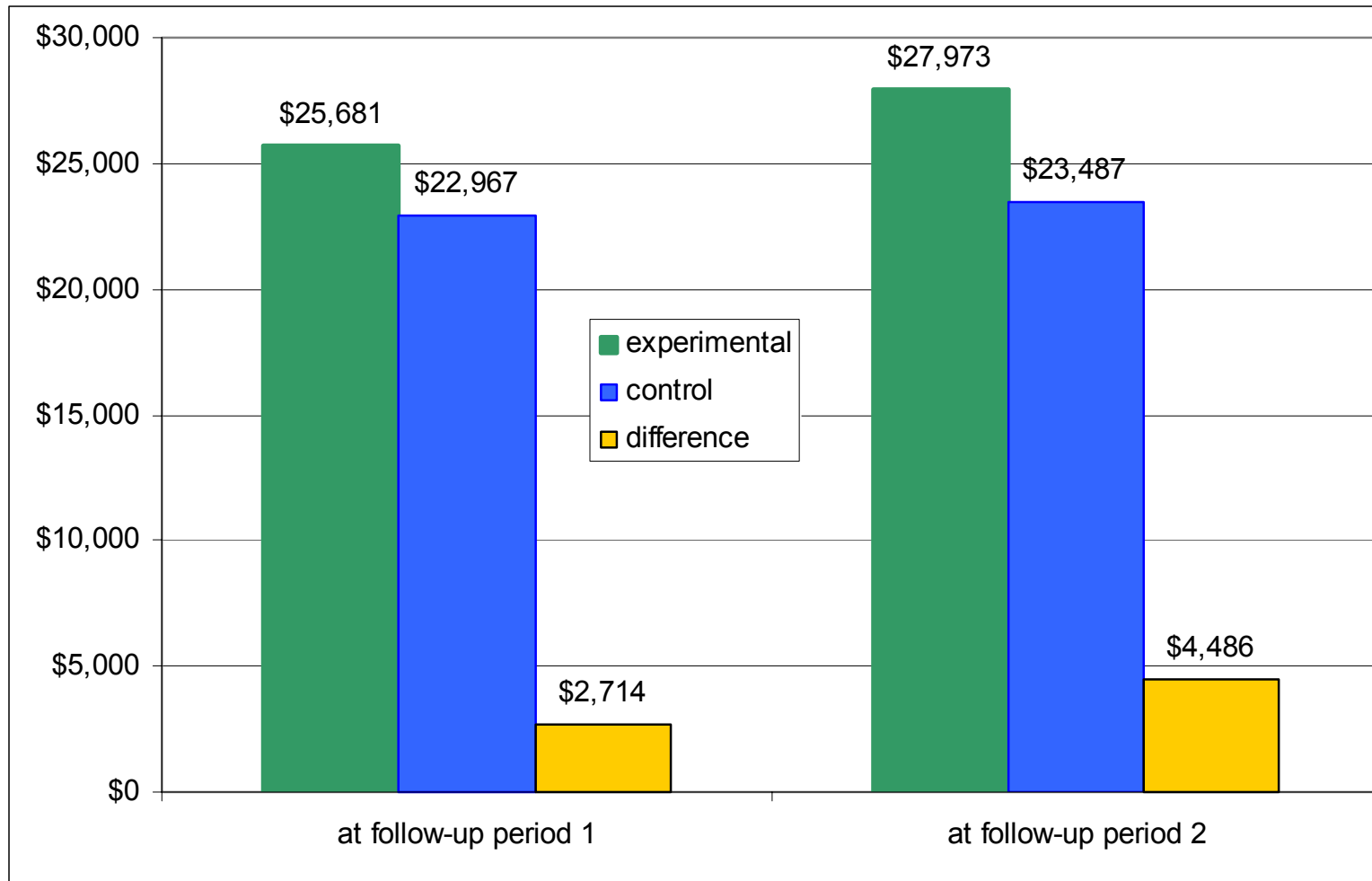
- AR families more likely to see family as better off because of the involvement with CPS
- AR families more likely to see children better off because of involvement with CPS
- AR families have had more stable living situations (*AR have lived in present residence 16.3% longer*)
- AR survey respondents somewhat more likely to be employed during all of previous 12 months (*AR: 53% VS Control: 47%*)

Second Follow-up, continued

The following were found in second follow-up only when services were taken into account:

- AR caregivers were less likely to report that the children in their household:
 - Have a hard time getting along with other students in school
 - Sometimes refuse to go to school or skip without their knowing it
 - Act as if they might be depressed
 - Engage in occasional delinquent behavior
- AR families were less likely to report that the following problems were present in their households:
 - Alcohol
 - Drugs
 - Domestic Violence

Mean Household Income



Impact Study: Data Collection

- Primary Data Source: the Social Services Information System (SSIS)
 - SSIS data extracts have been received from DHS through December 2003. Programs that convert these files to the research database have been modified (January 2004) to handle recent modifications to SSIS.

- Study Population
 - The experimental study is focused on families that entered during the first two years (2001 and 2002).
 - In the 14 impact study counties prior to 1/1/2003 there were:
 - 3,241 Experimental families that received AR in the target case.
 - 318 Experimental families that received a traditional investigation (TR) due to a track change (that is, a change from AR to TR).
 - 2,284 Control families that received a TR.
 - In the 6 counties with no control groups prior to 1/1/2003 there were:
 - 1,524 families that received AR.

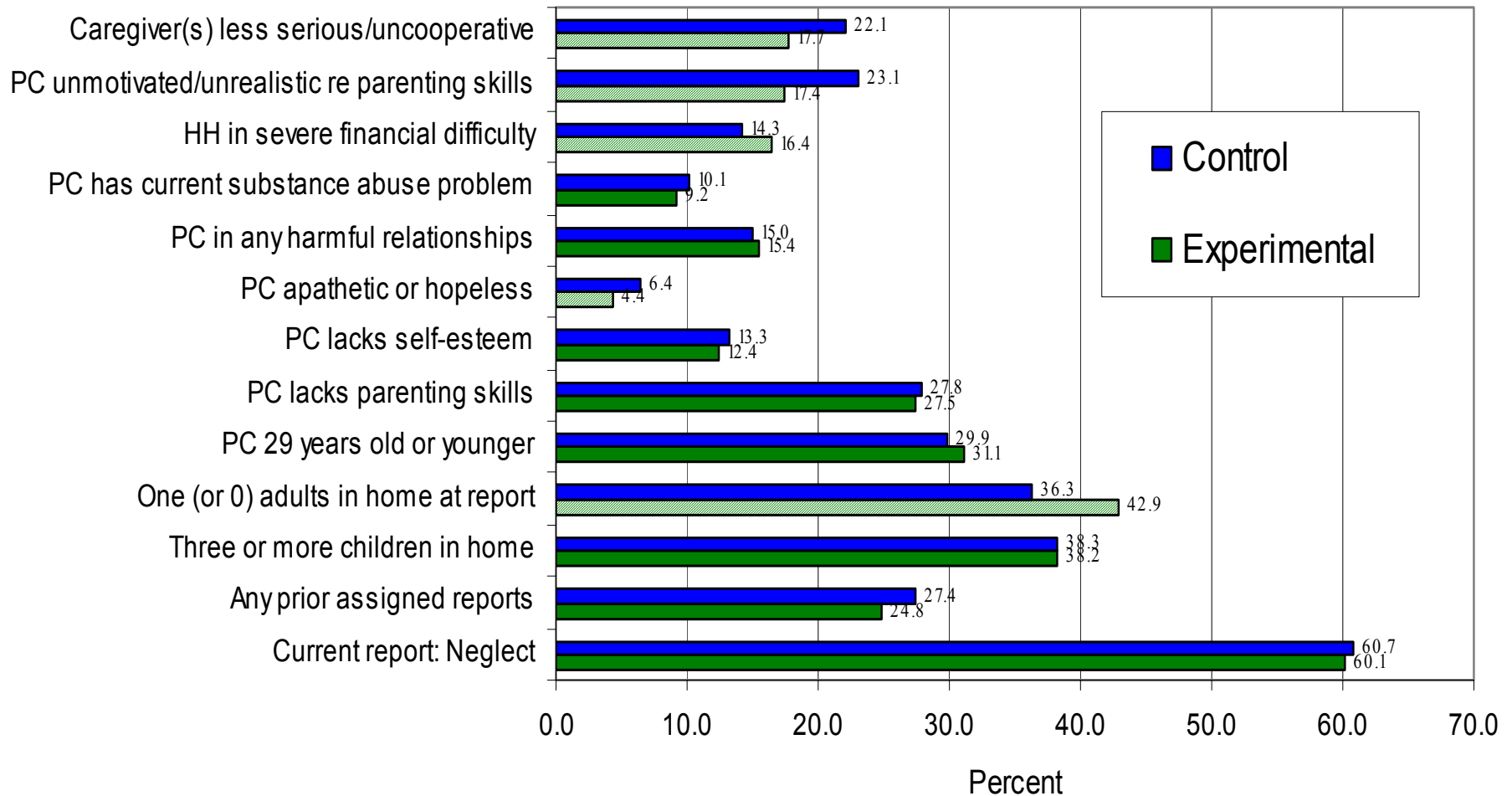
Family Risk Assessment and Alternative Response

- The Minnesota Structured Decision Making Family Risk Assessment (FRA) Instrument was utilized for all families in the evaluation, whether they received a traditional response (CPS investigation) or an Alternative Response (AR family assessment).
- By scoring and summing a set of 25 weighted neglect and abuse risk items, workers could assign one of four risk levels to families: low, moderate, high, and intensive risk.
- A slight bias was discovered in the application of the risk assessment instrument to experimental versus control families. This occurred because the FRA is completed at the conclusion of the investigation/assessment process.
 - Several risk items are dependent on the depth of the worker's **knowledge** of the family and **may be affected by the extent** of the assessment.
 - Several risk items are based on qualitative assessments and may be **affected by the nature of the interaction** between worker and family, and in turn, by the general approach to assessment.
- The items are shortened and summarized in the first two of the following three charts.

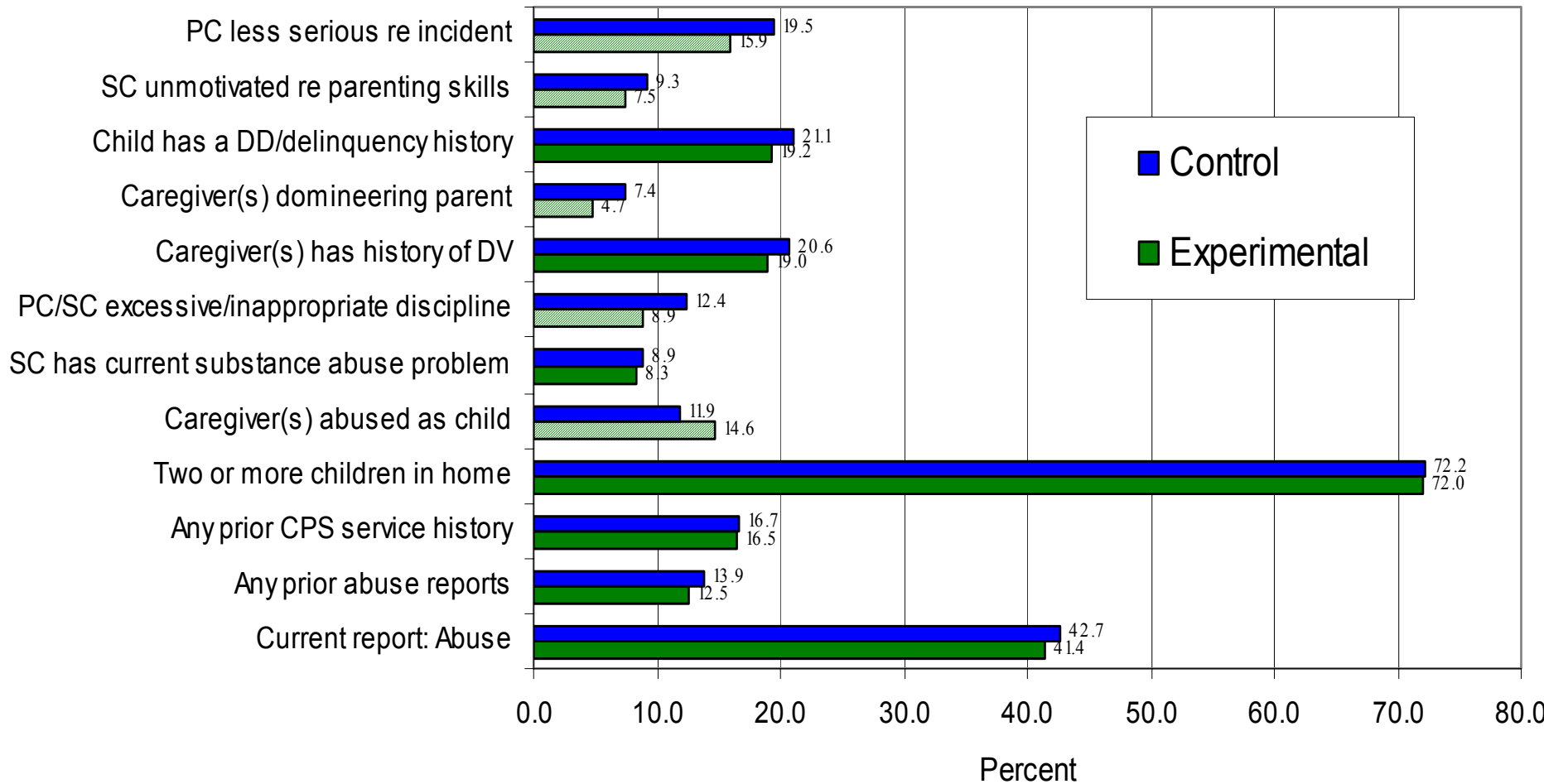
Family Risk Assessment and Alternative Response

- The proportions of families with risk items checked in the experimental and control groups are shown in the following two charts. Because families were randomly assigned the two bars should be the same in all cases, but they were not.
- (For those items that involved statistically significant differences, the bar for the experimental group is striped rather than solid.)
- When differences were found, they were usually for items that required greater depth of knowledge (for example, whether the adult had been abused as a child) or items that could have been affected by family interaction (for example, whether the caregiver was cooperative).
- This finding is consistent with the following:
 - AR workers spend greater time with families and elicit greater family participation and may learn more about families than investigators, especially investigators in unsubstantiated investigation.
 - AR family assessments are friendlier and less threatening than investigations, leading to less frequent conclusions of lack of cooperation or lack of motivation.
- The overall effect was slightly to lower assessments of risk for families in the experimental group (that received AR family assessments) compared to the control group (that received investigations). This is shown in the third graph of the following three ("Final Risk Categories").

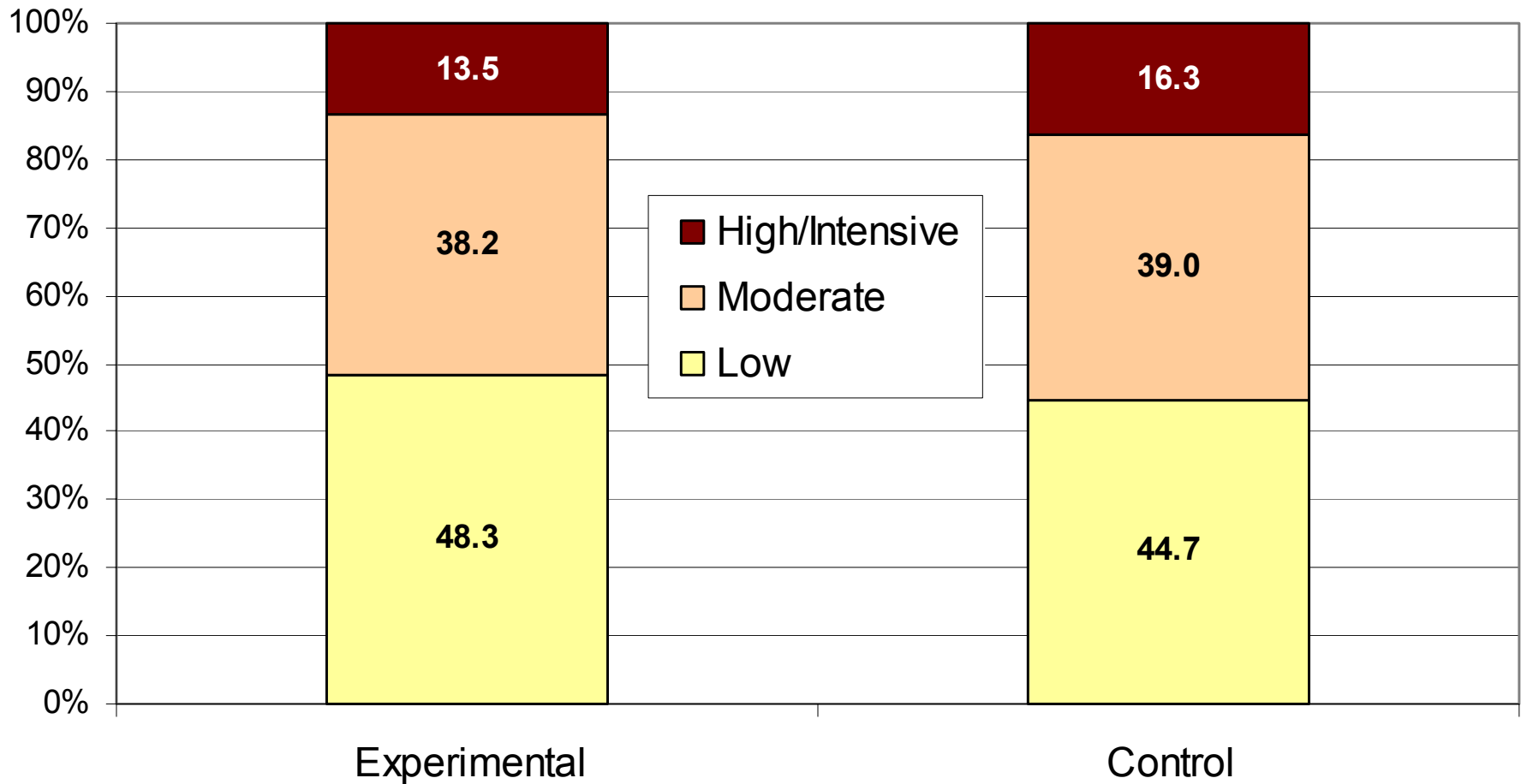
AR Experimental and Control Families: Neglect Risk Items



AR Experimental and Control Families: Abuse Risk Items



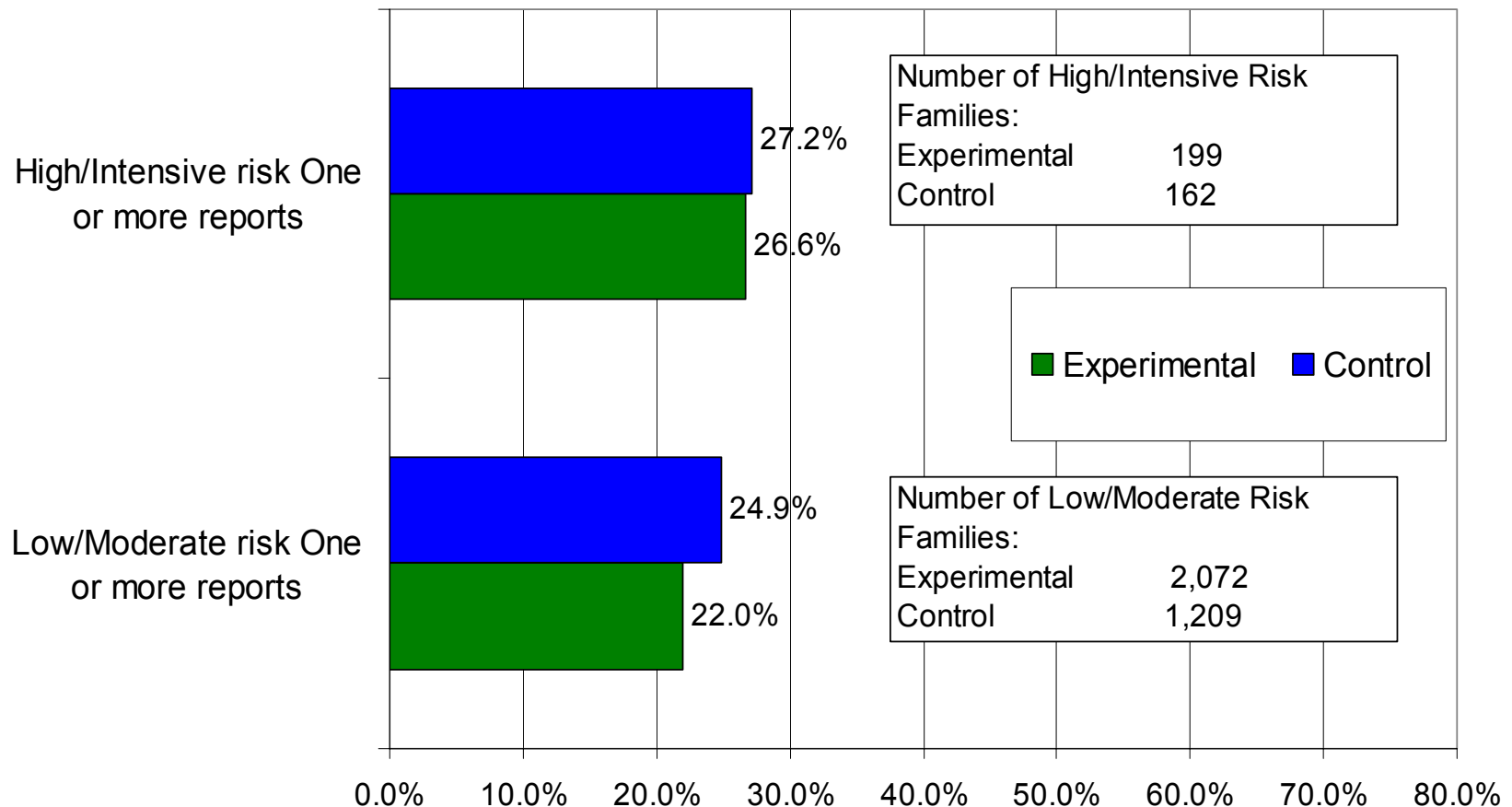
AR Experimental and Control Families: Final Risk Categories



Recurrence of Child Maltreatment Reports

- The absence of recurrence of child maltreatment reports was taken as one measure of success with families.
- Families were randomly assigned to experimental (alternative response) or control (traditional response) status after an “initial report” of child maltreatment.
- New reports were counted after the “initial case” had been closed:
 - In some instances the “initial case” referred to only an assessment workgroup (family assessment or investigation) when no formal service case was opened for the family and no children were removed.
 - In other cases the “initial case” also included a formal service case.
 - The close of the initial case, therefore, referred to the last consecutive contact of a CPS worker with the family after the initial report.
- Families were assigned to the experimental and control groups during the period from February 2001 through December 2002. Only families whose cases had closed before April 2003 were included in the present analysis. Follow-up data were available through the end of September 2003.
- Based on the FRA families were grouped into those with low or moderate risk score versus those with high and intensive risk scores.
- The percent with any new child maltreatment reports are shown in the following graph.

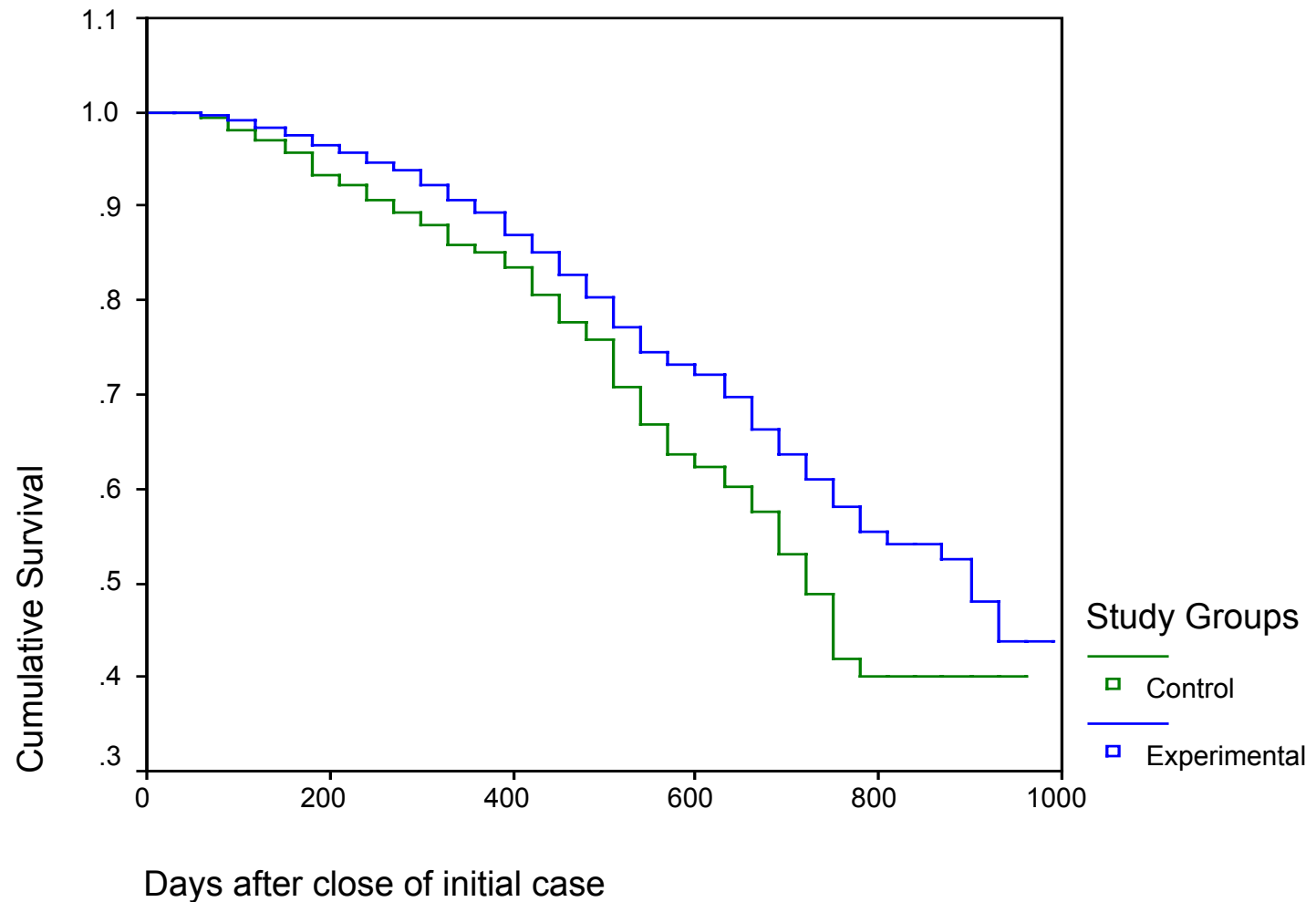
AR Experimental and Control Families: Any Recurrence of Child Maltreatment Reports



Recurrence of Child Maltreatment Reports

- Recurrence was significantly lower for low/moderate risk experimental families than similar control families.
- Because the Alternative Response program screens out families in which criminal or very dangerous child maltreatment is reported, the percentage of high/intensive risk families was small in each group (199 experimental families and 162 control families). Comparatively, most experimental and control families were in the low and moderate risk categories (2,072 experimental; 1,209 control).
- The proportions shown in the preceding graph include families who were followed from six months or more after the close of the initial case (see previous note page). However, the follow-up period varied between six months and more than two years.
- The proper statistical technique for these kinds of data is survival analysis. The most basic type of survival analysis (life table) is illustrated in the following graph.
- “Survival” refers to the number of days after case closing without a new report of child maltreatment. The graph shows that the experimental families survived longer. The difference in this case was also statistically significant.

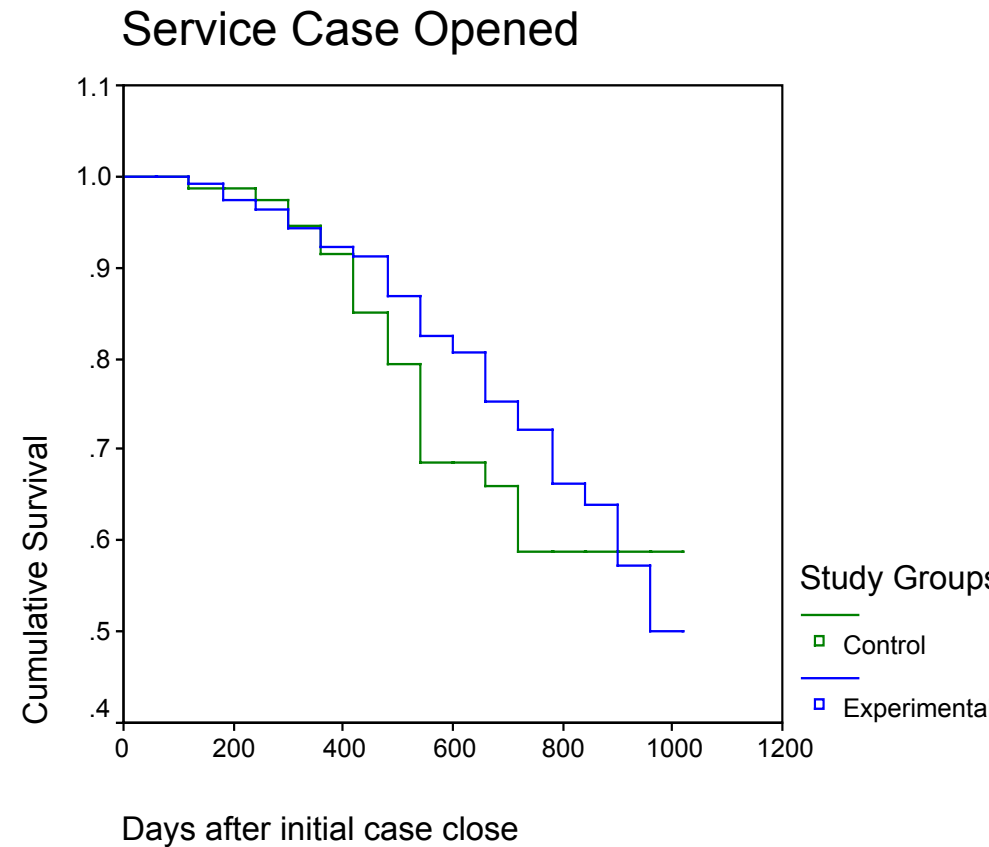
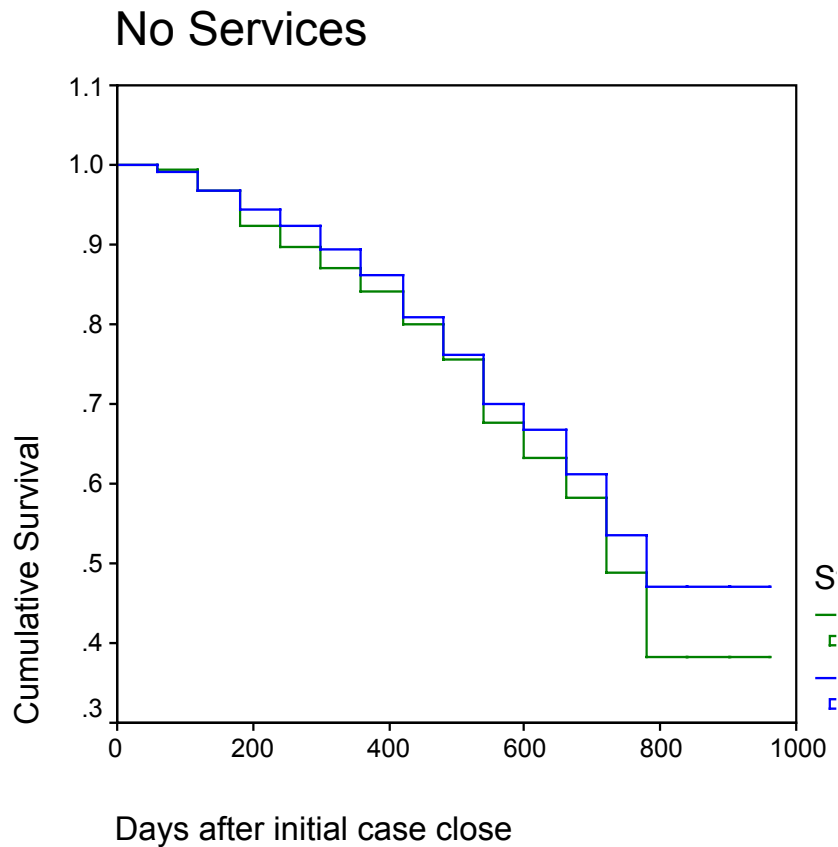
Survival Function: New Maltreatment Reports for Families with Low or Moderate Risk Scores



Services: New maltreatment reports for families with low or moderate risk scores who had case management work groups opened.

- To test whether services might be implicated in the positive effects of AR upon recurrence, experimental and control families were divided into those that had a service case (case management work group) opened and those that did not.
- Many more experimental families had service cases opened (25.0%) than control families (5.6%).
- Among low and moderate risk families experimental-control differences were found both for those that had and those that did not have service cases opened.
- Survival functions were similar in both cases to the previous graph.
- Numbers of families were smaller.
- At this time the differences between experimental and control recurrence were not statistically significant for either families with or families without service cases but could be described as statistical trends (no services = .12; service case = .10).
- This may indicate that the AR approach has effects of recurrence apart from the level of services provided. Other analyses will be used later in the evaluation to consider this question.

Survival Function: New maltreatment reports for families with low or moderate risk scores who had case management workgroups opened.



Initial Presenting Problem by Recurrence

- Certain kinds of presenting problems (in the initial report—see above for definition) appeared to be more responsive to the AR approach than others.
- The kinds of initial presenting problems for which AR produced a significant difference in reporting recurrence were:
 - Failure to provide for basic needs (food, clothing, shelter)
 - Physical abuse
 - Threatened physical abuse
 - Endangerment
- No differences were found for:
 - Lack of supervision
 - Educational neglect

Removal and Placement after the Initial Case

- Small proportions of children were removed and placed outside their homes after initial cases were closed, that is, after later reports.
 - 219 of 2,115 Experimental families (9.4%)
 - 192 of 1,291 Control Families (10.5%)
- These differences were not statistically significant ($p = .13$) but do not take into account time.
- Survival analysis (next chart) took time into account and was statistically significant.
- This finding may indicate a long-term effect of AR on new child removals and placement. This was not found in the early evaluation of the Missouri Family Assessment—a system similar to Minnesota Alternative Response. In the final analysis several additional months of follow-up will be available and certain families with longer-term cases will be considered.

Removal and Placement after the Initial Case

